Acting Edition

Mercury

by Steve Yockey

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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www.concordtheatricals.com
www.concordtheatricals.co.uk

FOR PRODUCTION INQUIRIES

United States and Canada
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MERCURY premiered at Salt Lake Acting Company (Cynthia Fleming, Executive Artistic Director) on October 11, 2017. The production was directed by Shannon Musgrave, with scenic design by Gage Williams, costumes by Philip R. Lowe, lighting by James M. Craig, sound by Cynthia L. Kehr Rees, prop design by Janice Jenson, projection design by Michael Horejsi, and puppet design and construction by Linda L. Brown & Steven Glenn Brown. The Production Stage Manager was Justin Ivie. The cast was as follows:

PAMELA . . . . . Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin
HEATHER . . . . . Brighton Hertford
ALICIA . . . . . Lily Hye Soo Dixon
OLIVE . . . . . April Fossen
NICK . . . . . Max Cedar Huftalin
BRIAN . . . . . Tito Livas
SAM . . . . . Aaron Adams

CHARACTERS

PAMELA – a married woman, definitely type A, used to getting her way in most things, and probably pretty lonely

HEATHER – a married woman, charismatic and poised, used to relying on a friendly smile to smooth things over

ALICIA – a woman, chatty with a "new age" vibe, she vacillates between flighty and ominous, steeped in the occult

OLIVE – a woman, a downstairs neighbor, someone who thinks of herself as good and correct, myopic, also a busybody

NICK – a man, a solid communicator, he's doing an okay job of holding it together, staying positive; the strong one

BRIAN – a man, handsome and flippant, definitely an urbanite, still learning how to really commit during hard times

SAM – Alicia's boyfriend; he's not an angry guy, just very matter of fact, easily frustrated, and usually bloody; he's also the physical manifestation of vengeance

SETTING

In and around Portland, OR.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

[ ] indicate overlapping dialogue.

The set is essentially a wooden platform with everything needed during the play. The platform is on a "revolve" with one of four locales set on each side. No walls. Everything can be seen. Alicia is the only force visibly turning the stage between scenes, accompanied by large mechanical sounds. It looks like hard work. Behind the set, an immense scrim or screen looms. It is only used during Scene Six. **This description is meant to be a useful place to start exploring how this play lives onstage**.

For a short time, a moon of Mercury was thought to exist. On March 27, 1974, two days before the Mariner 10 probe made its flyby of the planet, instruments began registering large amounts of ultraviolet radiation in the vicinity that, according to one astronomer, "had no right to be there." But by the next day, the radiation had disappeared. It then reappeared three days later, seeming to originate from an object independent of Mercury. Shortly thereafter, this flickering "moon" was explained away simply as a star making noise in the background of the sensors.

One

(A kitchen. **PAMELA** *is seated at a table. Jeans and a T-shirt. Another chair sits empty. A variety of small cacti are arranged in front of her on the table. Maybe there are a half dozen, maybe even more. There is also a small spray bottle and a glass tumbler. It's a very generous scotch on the rocks.)*

(She is quietly humming a little tune to herself and rearranging the order of the cacti. The doorbell rings. She ignores it. There is a knock. She ignores that, too.)

*(***HEATHER** *tiptoes in wearing an easy dress with a cardigan. She stops short. She clearly didn't know anyone was home. For her part,* **PAMELA** *is distracted, but almost aggressively bright and chipper.)*

HEATHER. Oh! Oh, hi. You're here. I didn't know you were home.

PAMELA. I suppose that's why you used your key?

HEATHER. I did knock first. And rang the doorbell, [but you…?]

PAMELA. [Mmhm, I] heard you, I was busy. I am arranging my new cacti into a pleasing configuration before I decide where to place them. I'm getting a feel for them.

HEATHER. All right?

PAMELA. Trial and error. Oh, did you need some sugar? Did you need to borrow a cup of sugar? That's what a neighbor does, right? We're being neighborly so I assume you came to borrow a cup of sugar, or take a cup of sugar as it were.

HEATHER. You know I don't bake.

PAMELA. Yes, I do know that. Then did you need some fabric softener?

HEATHER. You don't have to do all this, Pamela.

PAMELA. What do you need, Heather? I don't know what you imagine, but these cacti will not arrange themselves and I have other things to do before my husband gets home.

HEATHER. Like finish your scotch?

PAMELA. Like finish my scotch, yes.

(She finishes the entire tumbler of scotch in one swig.)

HEATHER. Okay, I can tell you're not in the mood to chat right now.

PAMELA. Can you?

HEATHER. I came over looking for Mr. Bundles, have you seen him?

PAMELA. Why would your dog be inside my house?

HEATHER. He's been missing since last night and I know you keep those treats for him so I thought maybe he... snuck in and you didn't realize?

PAMELA. You thought perhaps your Cavalier King Charles Spaniel "snuck" into my house for treats and I somehow didn't notice?

HEATHER. He is a smart dog. But when you say it like that it doesn't sound very plausible.

PAMELA. We have motion sensors.

HEATHER. All right.

PAMELA. We have motion sensors that beep and send messages directly to our phones.

HEATHER. I get it.

*(**PAMELA** chuckles to herself.)*

PAMELA. You don't need to manufacture a reason to come over.

HEATHER. Mr. Bundles is missing.

PAMELA. If you say so.

(She pours herself more scotch.)

Do you want some?

HEATHER. I shouldn't. Jimmy will be home soon. If he smells it on me, he starts spinning out into these silly guilt fantasies that I'm drinking away ennui. He's so hard on himself.

PAMELA. Perfect.

(She toasts and then drinks the scotch again. The whole glass.)

HEATHER. Oh my.

PAMELA. You should ask how I've been, shouldn't you?

(Pause.)

Since yesterday? How have I been since yesterday when you left me in a heap on the floor of my living room with the vacuum cleaner running like soul crushing white noise? I've been fine.

HEATHER. You turned on the vacuum cleaner to try to avoid me; you did that.

PAMELA. Aren't you perceptive?

HEATHER. Look, it took me hours to work up the nerve to talk to you. I wasn't going to let some light housework stop me.

PAMELA. Clearly.

HEATHER. So it's your fault that I had to yell and it's my fault I ran away so we both could have handled it better and I didn't come over here to rehash any of this, I'm just looking for Mr. Bundles. If you're hiding him, it's not funny. And he needs his eye drops.

PAMELA. Are you fucking serious?

HEATHER. Honey, he needs eye drops every morning. He's predisposed to glaucoma.

PAMELA. You're a saint.

HEATHER. It can't be a coincidence that he's missing now.

PAMELA. Do you like these cacti? I've never been a fan, you know me: perennials, perennials. And sure, maybe some ornamental grasses. But I was at the home goods store this morning and there they were, like a field of little anti-social tombstones in a dim corner. I just started putting them in my basket one [after another.]

HEATHER. [Pamela, I] meant I do not believe it's a coincidence he's missing.

PAMELA. I'm sorry your dog is missing, but I have no clues to help you and my spiny friends here require my attention. Actually, they require very little attention, or water, they're succulents. They're fleshy. They practically take care of themselves.

(She picks up the spray bottle and sprays a bit.)

In fact, I don't even need this. I don't even know why [I bought it.]

HEATHER. [Jesus, enough] about the cacti.

PAMELA. They're literally designed so you can't touch them, isn't that [fascinating?]

HEATHER. [I don't want to] talk about the cacti.

PAMELA. And I don't want to talk at all, so that works perfectly!

(Pause.)

HEATHER. Look, it wasn't easy, emotionally or because of the fucking vacuum, to tell you that we shouldn't do what we were doing [anymore and…]

*(***PAMELA** *starts laughing.)*

PAMELA. ["Do what we] were doing?"

HEATHER. Yes, do what [we were doing.]

PAMELA. [Have sex! Have] sex. For the love of God, just say "have sex," we were having regular, secretive, really [satisfying sex.]

HEATHER. [Shhhh. Keep] your voice down.

PAMELA. You don't need to be bashful and talk around it, there's no one [else here!]

HEATHER. [I'm not] interested in broadcasting our very [private business.]

PAMELA. [You're unbelievable,] I am in disbelief! Who do you think is going to hear me? We were having sex! We were having sex and enjoying a connection. And being a little less lonely, or I thought that's what we were doing. That's what I was doing.

HEATHER. We were also sneaking around, sneaking around wracked with guilt over a little bit of pleasure and I am not that lonely. I am not. You can be a cliché if you want to be a cliché, but I will no longer [indulge…]

PAMELA. [A cliché?!]

HEATHER. Yes! And I won't indulge that.

PAMELA. Well, this smacks of a prepared speech.

HEATHER. And the very same night our dog is missing.

PAMELA. And you're accusing me of what exactly?

HEATHER. I'm not accusing. I'm investigating.

PAMELA. Okay, I see. Now you think I'm some other cliché, right? That I sloughed off the "lonely housewife" routine for a little bit to try out "scorned lover."

(She sprays at **HEATHER** *with the spray bottle.* **HEATHER** *backs away.)*

HEATHER. Stop it.

(She sprays again, **HEATHER** *moves around the table to avoid her.)*

PAMELA. Am I a psychopath, is that what you [think?]

HEATHER. [No!]

(She chases **HEATHER** *around the table, spraying her.)*

PAMELA. Am I criminally psychotic, Heather? Am I crazed [and vengeful?!]

HEATHER. [No, of course] not! Pamela, stop it!

*(***PAMELA** *stops and sets down the spray bottle.)*

PAMELA. No, I'm just your neighbor and things got complicated and things got hurtful. For me, I was hurt. But why on Earth would I do anything to your dog? [Why would…?]

HEATHER. [It hurts me,] too!

PAMELA. Does it?

HEATHER. I'm not heartless; of course it hurts. But it was never going to be anything more. I'm sorry, honey, but that was never going to happen. This was, maybe I shouldn't have come over [here today.]

PAMELA. [Maybe, but you] did! And you will, you'll come over for your dog, or some sugar, or some dryer sheets, or some heavy cream or cotton balls or whatever. It's not like we can avoid each other; you live next door. Right next door, a butterfly bush, a tiny little garden wall, then nothing but the sunlight through the kitchen window of your meticulously-restored Craftsman home and then you.

HEATHER. Honey, I'm sure after some time has passed, [we can…]

PAMELA. [Yep!]

(Pause. **PAMELA** *sits back down and begins to fiddle with the cacti.* **HEATHER** *sits down, taps the table nervously, and then gets up, launching into her speech…)*

HEATHER. I never meant to hurt you.

*(***PAMELA** *mimes shooting herself.)*

I never meant to hurt you and you know that. Yes, I was swept up in the romance of, in the illicit way we were together. And I want to apologize for getting carried away, or if I made you think that it could be more.

PAMELA. Which you did.

HEATHER. So I do want to apologize and I would have apologized yesterday if you had just turned off the goddamned vacuum cleaner. You're so beautiful, Pamela. And so unexpected. And just very, very special to me. And I love that you're right next door. I love…that. But I can't lie to Jimmy anymore and, really, I don't want to.

PAMELA. I don't want to lie to Mike, either. It doesn't feel good.

HEATHER. You see?

*(**PAMELA** begins to break, but she fights it. Focused on her cacti, she will not fully cry in front of **HEATHER** if she can help it.)*

PAMELA. But this doesn't feel good either.

HEATHER. I know.

PAMELA. This doesn't feel good.

HEATHER. I know.

PAMELA. And I guess I am lonely. Clichés are clichés for a reason.

HEATHER. Honey, I know.

PAMELA. I'm just… No, I'm fine. It's fine.

(Pause.)

HEATHER. I'm sorry I snuck into your house; I really don't know what I was thinking.

PAMELA. You were looking for Mr. Bundles.

HEATHER. Maybe that was a convenient excuse. Well not convenient, but he hasn't been gone that long. I'm sure I'm just being silly.

PAMELA. That can happen. You're silly and I'm just…

(She exhales releasing all of the tension from her body.)

HEATHER. Okay. Okay.

PAMELA. I should get back to this.

HEATHER. Honey, I don't understand what you're doing with the cacti.

PAMELA. I know.

HEATHER. All right. Well, we'll… I know! We'll have you and Mike over for dinner next week. How about that?

(This is pretty clearly the worst idea **PAMELA** *has ever heard.)*

A nice dinner with all four of us, yes. And things will start to feel normal. We'll make them normal, okay? We will make them normal.

PAMELA. Okay.

HEATHER. There's nothing we can't make right.

PAMELA. Nothing?

HEATHER. Not a thing.

*(***PAMELA** *pours another scotch.)*

Now I need to find Mr. Bundles. Poor little guy, who knows where he'll end up?

PAMELA. Of course.

HEATHER. Sometimes I think that dog is too clever for his own good.

PAMELA. Heather, you should look…

(Pause.)

I know you don't like gardening. But you should take some gloves and one of my trowels and dig behind that butterfly bush you gave me last spring. Where the dirt is freshly overturned. You won't have to dig very deep.

*(***HEATHER** *stares in disbelief.* **PAMELA** *might even relish this moment.)*

HEATHER. Pamela.

PAMELA. There's nothing we can't make right.

(She drinks her scotch. **HEATHER** *covers her mouth and rushes out.)*

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